

Changes Coming to the Downtown Welcome Table

In early 2024 we will be discontinuing our Sunday meal and making plans to return to a family-style format on Wednesdays. Not exactly like it was before COVID, but more similar to that than the current restaurant-style format. Because of the ways we understand worshipping together and eating together to be deeply connected, we will end sanctuary worship at the same time the Sunday breakfast ends.

Why this change?

In its current format, the Downtown Welcome Table is on a crash course with sustainability. Not just the money. The pace, volume and intensity are spiraling upward rapidly. The stressors have changed. It's necessary for us to adapt and get creative in order to make sure we are staying on track with what we are really trying to accomplish.

- The meal is meant to be a platform for relationships. Addressing food insecurity is secondary.
- The intention is for every meal to feel like a family reunion where we linger together over a shared meal.
- Boundaries that may divide us 'out in the real world' can disappear when we break bread together. The mutuality of giving and receiving is important as we pass food around the table.
- Developing deep relationships requires slow time together.

The Bigger Picture

While losing the Sunday meal is painful, we also recognize that as an organization, growth in some areas necessarily means contraction in other areas. Two key areas of growth for us right now are:

- Haywood Street Respite, where in 2023 we increased by 33% the number of beds and made a deliberate shift to increase support for unhoused community members who have physical health challenges and also substance use/mental health challenges.
- Haywood Street Community Development, where we have finally reached the starting line for our first deeply affordable apartment community. New construction with 66 bedrooms across 41 apartments designed with dignity and built for belonging is beginning now (permits submitted in December; groundbreaking in January-February).

Regarding worship, we'll hold space and invite the Holy Spirit to help us to know what's next.

Community Resources

It's necessary for us to stay focused on what makes the Downtown Welcome Table unique – to nurture and develop that – and to support our partners in doing what they do well. We'll remain open on Mondays - Thursdays as a congregation and community of housed and unhoused individuals sharing life together. We'll continue to welcome community partners into that context to provide resources and supports for folks' very real needs.

Existing Sunday meals provided by other organizations include:

- Church of the Advocate worship and lunch (12:30 - 3 pm)
- Western Carolina Rescue Ministries' boxed dinner (4 - 5 pm)

What does this mean for Sunday companions?

While we will no longer have a Sunday meal, there are many ways in which Sunday companions and congregants can continue to participate at Haywood Street. We need you! Here are a few examples:

- Sign up for a weekend or evening shift in Haywood Street Respite. Having a second person present during those times is extremely helpful and allows staff to expand what they do, i.e., accompany friends to AA/NA meetings; implement a desired art group on weekends; host a community meal for former Respite friends once a month; etc.
- Participate with a special event or "behind the scenes" planning team. With all our committees and planning teams, we strive for participation by housed and unhoused community members.
- Help with any of the existing opportunities on Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday tied to the Downtown Welcome Table, worship, community garden, story circle, haircutting, campus care, mercy league, greeting/welcoming, and/or staffing the Community Rooms.
- Help the pastoral staff plan/implement ways our congregation can continue worshiping together given the new Monday-Thursday schedule.

Timeline?

- Last Sunday breakfast February 4th
- Wednesday meals continue with table service format during February
- Family style format in two dining rooms beginning Wednesday, March 6th

Lots of help will be needed preparing the dining rooms and kitchen for family style service. If interested in helping, please contact [Katlyn](#) or [Laura B.](#), who will be serving as Interim Companion Coordinator during Katlyn's parenthood leave.